

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ACDA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 041629Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9878

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PDEV, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUATION OF
CEASEFIRE

REF: (A) BELFAST 111; (B) BELFAST 101

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH PREVAILING VIEW IN BELFAST INDICATES PROVISIONAL IRA WILL TRY TO MAINTAIN CEASEFIRE FOR NEXT FEW MONTHS, THERE ARE REASONS TO BELIEVE IT MAY RESUME OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS BEFORE MID-SUMMER. CLEARLY THERE APPEAR TO BE INCENTIVES FOR THEM TO DO SO, AS RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HAVE ALTERED CONDITIONS WHICH ORIGINALLY CAUSED THEIR LEADERS TO DECLARE CEASEFIRE. IT IS, HOWEVER, EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHAT ACTIONS THE PROVISIONAL IRA MAY DECIDE UPON. END SUMMARY.

2. IF THE HISTORY OF NORTHERN IRELAND CONTAINS ANY LESSONS FOR OUTSIDE OBSERVERS, THEY ARE THAT (A) EVENTS ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO FORECAST AND (B) THE UNEXPECTED IS THE RULE MORE OFTEN THAN THE EXCEPTION. FROM LONDON IT APPEARS PERCEPTIONS IN THAT TROUBLED PROVINCE, WHICH OFTEN SEEM ILLOGICAL TO OUTSIDERS, ARE WITHOUT QUESTION

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THE BEST BAROMETER AVAILABLE. ACCORDINGLY, WE DO NOT

WISH TO QUARREL WITH GROWING CONVICTION IN BELFAST THAT PROVISIONAL IRA (IRAP) WILL SEEK TO HOLD TO ITS CEASE-FIRE FOR THE DURATION OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND SIX-MONTH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION (REF A). NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE OTHER SIGNS WHICH SUGGEST IRAP MAY RESUME OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS BEFORE MID-SUMMER.

3. PRESS HERE HAS REPORTED INCREASING RESTIVENESS AND DISSATISFACTION WITHIN IRAP OVER CONTINUED CEASEFIRE, AND THESE REPORTS ARE MATCHED BY GROWING DOUBT ABOUT IRAP INTENTIONS IN NI OFFICE (IT IS STRESSED THAT THESE DOUBTS HAVE NOT YET REACHED A LEVEL THAT COULD BE CLASSIFIED AS SIGNIFICANT CONCERN -- INDEED, THEY MAY ONLY REFLECT A DETERIORATION OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN IRAP AND NI OFFICE). THE RELEASE OF OVER 200 IRAP DETAINEES SINCE DECEMBER (SOME 370 REMAIN IN CUSTODY) AND THE ALMOST UNIVERALLY ACCEPTED ASSUMPTION THAT THE IRAP HAS USED THE CEASEFIRE PERIOD TO REBUILD ITS SUPPLY OF WEAPONS, ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES, LEAVES THE IRAP WITH FAR BETTER CAPABILITY FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS THAN IT HAD FOUR MONTHS AGO. THIS PARTICULAR OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINT ON IRAP VIOLENCE, THEREFORE, HAS BEEN GREATLY REDUCED, THOUGH NOT ELIMINATED. NI SECRETARY REES, OF COURSE, WAS AWARE THIS WOULD HAPPEN, AND IT WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR ELEMENTS IN HIS GAMBLE ON THE CEASEFIRE.

4. THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN DECISION NOT TO CONTEST THE CONVENTION ELECTIONS (REF B) DEMONSTRATES THE EARLIER SUPPOSITION THAT IRAP HIGH COMMAND WISHED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, IF IT WAS EVER VALID, IS NO LONGER OPERATIVE. REMAINING CONSTRAINTS ON IRAP VIOLENCE THEN, APPEAR TO BE (A) CONTINUED REJECTION OF VIOLENCE

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BY NI CATHOLIC COMMUNITY WITH CONCOMITANT DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR IRAP, AND (B) HOPE THAT CONVENTION WILL FAIL. LATTER EVENTUALITY WOULD SERVE IRAP INTERESTS BY DEMONSTRATING COMMUNAL POLITICAL COOPERATION IS IMPOSSIBLE, DISCREDITING MODERATE POLITICAL FORCES AND POSSIBLY PROVOKING STRONG POPULAR REACTION IN BRITAIN (REF A). THERE IS NOTHING TO INDICATE FORMER CONSTRAINT HAS LESSENED IN RECENT WEEKS, AND THERE IS LITTLE IRAP CAN DO TO CREATE A SITUATION MORE FAVORABLE TO ITS INTERESTS. IRAP, HOWEVER, ALMOST CERTAINLY HAS THE CAPACITY TO ENSURE THE CONVENTION FAILS AND IS NO DOUBT WELL AWARE OF THIS FACT. ANOTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE EQUATION IS THE IRAP HIGH COMMAND'S ABILITY TO CONTROL ITS MORE MILITANT ELEMENTS. THEY REPORTEDLY FAVOR RENEWED ACTION AND COULD ACT WITHOUT OFFICIAL SANCTION OR SPLIT WITH THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP.

5. IT SEEMS TO US, ACCORDINGLY, THAT THE KNOWLEDGE THAT A RETURN TO VIOLENCE WOULD VIRTUALLY ENSURE COLLAPSE OF THE CONVENTION IS A POWERFUL INCENTIVE FOR IRAP TO RESUME OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS, EITHER DURING CAMPAIGN PERIOD OR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONCE CONVENTION HAS BEGUN ITS DELIBERATIONS. RESUMPTION OF VIOLENCE DURING THE CAMPAIGN WOULD PROBABLY PROVOKE A LIKE RESPONSE FROM MILITANT PROTESTANTS AND ENSURE THE DEFEAT OF THE MORE REASONABLE UNIONIST CANDIDATES, THUS GREATLY INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE CONVENTION WOULD DEADLOCK. SUCH ACTION, OF COURSE, WOULD ENTAIL SOME RISK TO THE IRAP'S ALREADY DIMINISHED SUPPORT IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY. A MORE RATIONAL COURSE MIGHT BE TO AWAIT THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS, AND ONLY RESUME VIOLENCE IN THE EVENT THE RESULTS INDICATE THAT ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNITIES MIGHT BE REALIZED, BUT THIS WOULD BE LESS ATTRACTIVE TO THE IRAP MILITANTS WHOSE FINGERS ARE ITCHING TO BE BACK ON THE TRIGGER. EITHER WAY, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE LOGICAL BASIS FOR

HOPING THE CEASEFIRE WILL LAST FOR NEXT SEVEN OR EIGHT
MONTHS. BUT AS WE NOTED AT THE BEGINNING, LOGIC IS
USUALLY A POOR GUIDE FOR EVENTS IN NI.

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